

Social Identities

Journal for the Study of Race, Nation and Culture

ISSN: 1350-4630 (Print) 1363-0296 (Online) Journal homepage: <https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/csid20>

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To cite this article: Fiona-Katharina Seiger (2019) 'Mixed' Japanese-Filipino identities under Japanese multiculturalism, *Social Identities*, 25:3, 392-407, DOI: [10.1080/13504630.2018.1499225](https://doi.org/10.1080/13504630.2018.1499225)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504630.2018.1499225>



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Published online: 23 Jul 2018.



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'Mixed' Japanese-Filipino identities under Japanese multiculturalism

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ABSTRACT

The ways in which multiculturalism is debated and practiced forms an important frame for 'mixed' ethnic identities to take shape. In this paper, I explore how young migrants of Japanese-Filipino 'mixed' parentage make sense of their ethnic identities in Japan. My key findings are that dominant discourses constructing the Japanese nation as a monoracial, monolingual and monoethnic nation leave no space for diversity within the definition of 'Japanese', creating the necessity for alternative labels like *haafu* or 'mixed roots'. Japanese multiculturalism does not provide alternative narratives of *Japaneseness* but preserves the myth of Japanese racial homogeneity by recognizing diversity while maintaining ethnic and racial boundaries. Lastly, these categories have not been actively questioned by my respondents. Rather, they show flexibility in adopting these various labels – *haafu*, 'mixed roots', Filipino, *Firipin-jin* – in different contexts.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 11 June 2018
Accepted 27 June 2018



KEYWORDS

Japanese-Filipino children;
mixed-ethnic; identity;
multiculturalism; Japan

Introduction

In late December 2015, I met Erika¹ in a popular area in Osaka known as the local salary-men's² watering hole. Erika, a Japanese-Filipina woman in her late twenties, was born in Japan but moved to the Philippines at the age of five. She grew up having sustained contact with her Japan-based Filipino mother, regularly travelled to Japan, and received goodie packages with Japanese products throughout her childhood, all of which made her feel she was also Japanese. As we met for *yakitori* (chicken skewers) that evening in December, Erika told me about her recent experiences working with a Japanese film-crew in Tokyo. She referred to herself as the only foreigner on the crew and told me how she struggled with the language, rules of behaviour and politeness. This experience reinforced a sentiment she had expressed in an earlier conversation, that of not being able to claim she was Japanese:

Since I was able to live here for two years, that's when I realized I am not really ... what I thought was Japanese about me, it did not matter. I realized I am culturally and socially Filipino. Right now I have some insecurities because I cannot speak Japanese well. So when I

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introduce myself as half Japanese- half Filipina, I feel embarrassed. In a way, I feel disappointed in myself. I feel when Japanese meet me, they expect I would act a certain way and speak [Japanese]. But when they find out I can't speak, I feel ashamed.

Like Erika, individuals of 'mixed' Japanese descent may find it challenging to fully identify as Japanese given mainstream ethno-nationalist definitions of who counts as a member of the Japanese nation (Lie, 2003). Phenotype and a lack of linguistic and cultural proficiencies can turn into markers of difference that disqualify a person from being recognized – and even from recognizing themselves – as fully Japanese despite the diversification of Japan's ethnic landscape following several waves of migration since the 1980s.

In many Asian countries multiculturalism has been a de facto reality for a long time (Asis & Batistella, 2013, p. 35). This is especially true for South-East Asia, including the Philippines where a history of colonialism and a long history of immigration within the Asian region have added to the diverse ethnic and cultural fabric of the archipelago. Subsequently, in the Philippines, claiming 'mixed' identities is not necessarily tied up with issues of belonging but rather with issues of social class and status (Seiger, 2017a, 2017b). However, in East-Asia 'national identity has often been defined as a homogeneous ethnic nationalism' (Watson, 2010, p. 338). The common connotations of language, culture and tradition that are vested in the idea of the ethno-nation-state have been disrupted by cross-border migration (Asis & Batistella, 2013; Jupp, 2015) and are 'increasingly at odds with global multicultural developments'. (Watson, 2010, p. 338)

With the diversification of Japanese society, discourses on multiculturalism, having originated as rights-movements among Japan's historical minorities (Chapman, 2006; Kashiwasaki, 2000; Okubo, 2013), gained ground at the state-level and at the level of local institutions (including local government and education boards). The acknowledgment of growing ethno-cultural and linguistic diversity led to the creation of policies and programmes geared at managing this diversity. Given the creation of new spaces for ethno-cultural 'difference' existing side-by-side with stringent ethno-nationalist definitions of who ought to be Japanese, I aim to explore how Japanese-Filipino children negotiate their ethnic identities upon migration into Japan. This entails an exploration of how Japanese-Filipinos draw upon discourses of multiculturalism and discourses of Japanese national identity in the process of stitching together their narratives of 'mixedness'.

I argue that discourses on multiculturalism have not disrupted dominant ideas of who ought to be Japanese but have complemented the latter. The anti-assimilationist stance underlying the development of multiculturalism in Japan and 'the emphasis on the status of foreigners in advocacy efforts had the effect of suppressing other types of claims-making' (Kashiwasaki, 2000, p. 37) and have maintained the Us/Them divide. For instance, when Japanese nationals with Korean roots reclaimed their ethnic Korean names, their demands were not well accepted by the Japanese public (ibid.). The discourse on multiculturalism in Japan primarily encouraged the Japanese to show an openness and interest for people of other countries. But, '[r]ather than turning immigrants into Japanese nationals, the primary goal was to turn each local Japanese community into a foreigner-friendly space. This goal corresponded with, and further encouraged, the tendency of activists to demand the rights of immigrants as foreign residents'. (p. 38)

A stark contrast to the Japanese case, for instance, is that of 'mixed race' families in Australia explored by Meyer and Fozdar (2017). The authors find that the perception of

Australian-ness as fundamentally multicultural provides an overarching mechanism that is inclusive of 'mixed race' individuals and therefore allows for 'mixedness' to be considered a normality (pp. 60, 62). Discourses on multiculturalism in Japan have not questioned the boundaries of *Japaneseness* but have instead created alternative spaces for children of 'mixed' descent. This has led to a situation in which my respondents choose among the various categories available to denote their out-of-the-ordinary 'mixedness', often switching between one and the other term situationally.

This paper is based on fieldwork conducted from September 2015 to September 2016 in the Kansai area in western Japan. Over the course of one year, I attended festivities in celebration of multiculturalism and regularly participated in activist-led non-profit initiatives supporting children with at least one migrant parent in their learning. Through my involvement, I had the chance to interact with or formally interview 34 Japanese-Filipino beneficiaries of educational support initiatives aged between nine and twenty-one. I initially concentrated on conducting participant observation which allowed me to get to know my young respondents, to observe their behaviour outside the formal interview setting, and to build a relationship of trust. In 2016, I then complemented my observations with focus group discussions; one involving six migrant Japanese-Filipino children aged nine to fourteen, two conducted at a high-school in Osaka during a Filipino 'mother tongue' class involving both migrant and non-migrant children of Filipino descent³ aged fifteen to twenty-one, and one focus group discussion with four Filipino mothers of Japanese-Filipino children. Additionally, I conducted four in-depth interviews with Japanese-Filipino youth, one interview with a Filipino mother and her two children, and chatted informally with the people involved in the organization of the educational support activities I had attended.

This study is a continuation of previous research project in which I focused on Japanese-Filipino youth and young adults based in the Philippines and explored their claims to Japanese ethnic identity as well as the involvement of activist non-governmental organizations in the process of claims-making (Seiger, 2017a). Then, the majority of my respondents were raised by their Filipino families with little knowledge of their Japanese fathers and no lived experience of Japan. In this paper, I continue to focus on my respondents' attitudes towards having a Japanese and a Filipino parent, but this time my respondents have embarked on their journeys from the Philippines to Japan.

Many of my respondents who have entered Japan over the past few years are part of a recent migratory flow from the Philippines to Japan that started around 2008. That year, the Japanese Supreme Court ruled Japan's nationality law to be discriminatory and ordered the removal of the provision stating that a child born to a Japanese father and a foreign mother could only obtain Japanese nationality if his/her parents were married at the time of his/her birth, or if the father officially recognized the child before birth. Consequentially, numerous mothers of Japanese-Filipino children in the Philippines filed for the restitution of their children's Japanese nationality. Many did so through migrant agents and brokers, who promise assistance with the paperwork while dispatching the former as care-givers to homes for the elderly in Japan.

The children thereby become their mothers' migration enablers by virtue of their Japanese descent. But, as young age is key in reclaiming Japanese nationality,⁴ this migration to Japan has uprooted children and youth of schooling age and required them to continue their education in a different cultural and linguistic setting. This particular route taken to

enter Japan also explains why many of the migrant Japanese-Filipino children concentrate in certain areas and schools, nearby the care-giving facilities to which their mothers have been deployed.

As in my previous work, I maintain that ethnic identification has a certain plasticity (Seiger, 2014, 2017a, 2017b). Proponents of the instrumentalist perspective on ethnic identities argue that ethnicity is malleable and defined situationally, meaning that ‘people (and peoples) can and do shift their ethnic ascriptions in the light of circumstance and environment. The pursuit of political advantage and/or material self-interest is the calculus which is typically held to inform such behaviour’ (Barth *in* Jenkins, 2008, p. 46). Ethnic identity, as a type of social identity, is ‘shaped, to greater or lesser degrees, by a combination of group identification and social categorization. Each is simultaneously implicated in the other; social identity is produced and reproduced in the dialectic of internal and external definition’ (p. 83). With discourses on national identity and multiculturalism in Japan forming important ideological frameworks, I thus explore how ethnic identities are (re-)negotiated by Japanese-Filipino children and youth upon migration.

‘Mixed’ identity re-constructions upon arrival in Japan

The number of children born to Japanese-foreign couples in Japan has significantly increased with Japan’s internationalization since the 1980s. The numbers of ‘international marriages’ rose dramatically from 12,181 in 1985 to 41,481 in 2005.⁵ The most common term used to refer to offspring of these relationships is *haafu* (from the English word ‘half’).⁶ The term indicates that a child has one Japanese parent and one non-Japanese parent, however *haafu* continues to be most commonly used in reference to offspring of Japanese and European descent (Okamura, 2017; Seiger, 2017b; Shaitan & McEntee-Atalians, 2017).

The popularity of Eurasian physical appearance has led to numerous Japanese-Caucasian *haafu* being featured in popular media, notably on television and in women’s magazines (Okamura, 2017). The largest number of ‘international marriages’ since the 1980s, however, has occurred between Japanese men and women from other Asian countries including China, Korea, the Philippines and Thailand. Consequentially, ‘visible *Hafus* are a minority of the minority’.⁷ Based merely on their looks, most offspring of ‘mixed’ relationships born in Japan seamlessly blend into the mainstream. More importantly though, many Asian ‘mixed’ roots Japanese actively conceal their foreign parentage (Almonte-Acosta, 2008; Ishii, 2013).

Ishii found that her Japanese-Thai respondents negotiated their ethnic identities according to how they perceived possible identifications to fare in society; usually they chose the most beneficial identification and avoided assuming an ethnicity deemed ‘disadvantageous’ (Ishii, 2013, p. 177).

Ishii’s respondents opted for multi-ethnic identities only if they had no option to assimilate into the Japanese mainstream as they were aware of the lowered status their Thai mothers occupy within Japanese society (*ibid.*). Most of the children Ishii studied would identify as Japanese, unless they were brought up by their Thai single mothers, which complicates this sole identification. In some cases, children expressed pity for their mothers for being Thai (*ibid.*), showing that there also is a process of racialized social hierarchies⁸ being internalized. Children born to a non-Caucasian parent would rather identify

as Japanese while those born to Japanese and Caucasians tend to assume their more advantageous 'Western' identity, according to Ishii (2013, pp. 171, 178).⁹

Almonte-Acosta (2008), in her study of Filipino-Japanese¹⁰ adolescents in Japan, found that most preferred to be identified as Japanese. Her respondents showed very little interest in things Filipino and rather '... go out of their way, so as not to be identified as part of the [Filipino] minority group' (p. 28). Almonte-Acosta concludes that Filipino-Japanese concealed their Filipino ancestry due to the pervasive myth of ethnic homogeneity, their desires to be part of the majority, as well as due to negative images associated with the Philippines and Filipino women in particular. Uchio (2015) likewise acknowledges the impact of such negative images on Filipino-Japanese ethnic identity constructions. Uchio however argues that his Filipino-Japanese respondents, instead of concealing their Filipino lineage, made use of their greater knowledge of English as well as of their Spanish lineage to offset negative prejudices against Filipinos. In doing so, they gained greater control over their positioning within Japanese society, not by challenging negative associations but by making use of alternative cultural resources.

In light of these findings, the words uttered by Aimi, a young Japanese-Filipina girl I met at a support-group meeting, gain even greater significance:

Whenever I tell my classmates that actually I am *haafu* they reply "no way!" and I am happy that they thought I was Japanese.

Aimi, fourteen years old, who was raised in Japan, who speaks the local dialect and whose looks do not raise suspicions over her *Japaneseness*, exclaimed how happy she was about her ability to blend in despite her 'mixed' parentage. Aimi also asserted that she was not able to speak English despite being *haafu* by recounting an imaginary situation in which a foreigner would ask her for directions to which she would reply in broken English with a heavy Japanese accent while making hasty movements with her arms. Aimi's statements were interesting for three reasons: firstly, she considered her ability to pass as 'fully Japanese' as something positive; secondly Aimi subscribed to the idea that 'mixed'-descent Japanese were multilingual and seemed to take pride in her 'truly Japanese' monolingual upbringing; and thirdly the way she described herself revealed that she imagined *haafu* to not actually be Japanese. In doing so, Aimi reiterated popular depictions of people of 'mixed' Japanese heritage which have pitched *haafu* against 'regular' Japanese (see also Okamura, 2017; Shaitan & McEntee-Atalianis, 2017). Indeed, what all the above-mentioned studies of *haafu* in Japan reveal is that people of 'mixed' Japanese heritage feel uncomfortably positioned as *gaijin*¹¹ within dominant narratives of 'mixedness' and national identity, especially if the non-Japanese markers of 'difference' cannot be concealed.

Unlike Aimi, most of my respondents were brought up in the Philippines. Their experiences of 'mixedness' thus intermeshed with their experiences of migration to Japan. As I have explained elsewhere (Seiger, 2017a, 2017b), numerous children born to Japanese-Filipino couples were raised in the Philippines without sustained contact with their Japanese parent, usually due to parental separation. Consequently, they grew up to be culturally and linguistically Filipino.¹² Upon arrival in Japan, these young migrants were confronted with a new socio-cultural and linguistic environment, with new neighbourhoods, a changed familial situation and, for those still of schooling age, a new school in an entirely new education system. Their poor proficiency in Japanese as well as their unfamiliarity with socio-

cultural codes initially rendered them highly visible and entailed a culture shock in the process of integrating into Japanese society.

Ai, now fourteen years old, used to attend a school for *Nikkeijin* (Japanese descendants) in the Philippines. There, Ai told me, people would regard her as Japanese because of her name and her eyes: 'They ask because my eyes are small, if I am Chinese or Japanese'. In the Philippines she thought of herself as 'Japanese-half'. In Japan, however, she felt more like a foreigner. Narrating episodes of cultural difference experienced at school, Ai and her friend Hiromi referred to themselves as *Firipin-jin* (Filipinos) during our focus group discussion, appropriating the label used by their Japanese classmates:

- Hiromi: In their school, if you so much as approach a boy, people immediately think you're lovers. I have this friend, a Filipino boy. Everyone thought he was my boyfriend. It's really something else.
- Interviewer: They really expect you to be separated?
- Hiromi: Yes.
- Interviewer: Even if you're in the same school?
- Ai: That's why [if we call him] 'Hey, Shig!'
- Hiromi: He doesn't respond. He just goes away.
- Ai: People thought they were together before.
- Hiromi: Well, I try to avoid it. They can talk that way, I know that it's not true anyway.
- Interviewer: So it's like that in your school? How about yours?
- Ai: Same.
- [...]
- Interviewer: Because of his friends? Peer pressure? They make fun of him?
- Big Group: Yeah, yeah!
- Ai: It's unfair. If it's a *Nihon-jin* (Japanese) girl and a *Nihon-jin* (Japanese) boy, they don't say anything. But if they're *Firipin-jin doshi* (Filipino fellows) they really start making assumptions. They're nice but when it comes to that it's like ...
- Hiromi: They like teasing.

Hiromi and Shig had become the subject of gossip in school not merely because they were unaware of cultural differences in how boys and girls are expected to relate to one another but, according to Ai, they drew additional ridicule because they were Filipinos. Appropriating the term *Firipin-jin* in reference to themselves, they seemed to have internalized the boundaries between 'us and them'. Japanese lineage, owning Japanese passports, or holding long-term visas as Japanese descendants, did not suffice to be regarded as Japanese. Japanese-Filipinos entered Japan as newcomers in their 'father's homeland'¹³ and were usually treated as foreigners.

Victoria, now 17 years old, resettled to Japan with her mother at age 13. Although she learned the Japanese language quickly, the way she spoke revealed that she spent many years of her childhood outside of Japan.

- Victoria: People always tell me, even when they see me, that I have a Japanese face. But when I start to talk my intonation is different from them and my grammar is different from them. So they say, 'oh! she's not Japanese'. So they will ask me are you half- or something? So I tell them yes. So they ask, who is Japanese your mom or your dad? So I tell them my dad. Erm, the thing that I don't like, even though I explain to them that I am half-Japanese, sometimes they address me as *Firipin-jin* and you know, not as half. And I don't know why. Maybe it's because I don't speak Japanese fluently or I did not grow up here but, I

- don't know. That's the only thing I noticed about when they ask me about my heritage.
- Interviewer: And how would you label yourself? What kind of name would you give to yourself?
- Victoria: I would label myself as a half-Japanese half-Filipino. I would embrace two countries.
- Interviewer: Is that different from just Japanese?
- Victoria: Yeah because I embrace two countries, not only one. So I don't focus on just Japan but I focus on both.
- Interviewer: Is that something you get from your classmates or in general?
- Victoria: I get it mostly from my classmates because my teachers they know. They don't ask much. But my classmates when they forget they just address me as *Firipin-jin* (Filipina).
- Interviewer: And why do you find it important [to be considered half]?
- Victoria: Maybe because I grew up in the Philippines I think. And I learned their culture there, their language and stuff. Yeah.

For Victoria the acknowledgment as half-Japanese was a sign of acceptance as Japanese, but her peers' continued labelling of her as *Firipin-jin* denied her that acceptance. Asked about the disadvantages of being 'mixed' she told me: 'the disadvantages are that I got bullied when I was younger and they [Japanese classmates] don't see me as half, they don't see me as one of them. They still see me as Filipino'. Based on my conversations with migrant Japanese-Filipino children, it seemed fairly common for them to be called Filipinos rather than *haafu*. While *haafu* remained positioned against 'regular' Japanese, this multi-ethnic identity seemed to denote some form of belonging to Japan for Japanese-Filipinos despite their 'difference'. Not even being acknowledged as *haafu* thus equated to a complete exclusion from being, if only in part, Japanese.

Experiences of discrimination have bred mistrust among migrant children and their mothers, and have further deepened the divide between 'us' and 'the Japanese'. One mother of a Japanese-Filipino boy recounted her son's first experiences at his new school in Japan, when he and other migrant children of Japanese-Filipino parentage were assembled for collective punishment:

- Mother: [Our children] were bullied. Even if it wasn't their fault, it was blamed on them. There was this one time that they detained our children in the faculty [office]. They wouldn't release them until we went to the school. [...] My son was traumatized. Good thing it didn't reach the point where he didn't want to go to school anymore.
- Interviewer: What was the teacher's reason for detaining all Filipino children?
- Mother: One of our co-worker's child— because there were a lot of kids in our batch [of migrant Filipino care-workers]. The kids were all together and there was this one Filipino child who hit someone. The child said he was defending himself because someone else started it. In the Philippines, unless someone hits you, you don't fight back. They believed the Japanese kid. So the children learned that they'll be the ones punished even if it's not their fault. That's how things were. They wouldn't be treated justly. Even if you had a Japanese passport, people still viewed you differently. You were still separated.

For this mother, her child and his friends were singled out because of their perceived foreignness and unjustly punished despite being Japanese nationals. A similar experience of unfair treatment was recounted by another mother of an 11-year old Japanese-Filipina

girl. Mother and child had arrived in Japan only a year before the interview took place and her daughter still struggled with expressing herself in Japanese. Two months into their stay in Japan, they were both called to their local police station because her daughter was accused of stealing a bicycle from the park where she usually goes to play. According to the child, however, one of her playmates had lent it to her. Her mother attempted to defend her daughter, but to no avail.

[My daughter] was called a thief. [...] The teachers went to the house while I was at work, without even listening to my kid's side of the story. They immediately believed the Japanese kid's over mine.

Both mothers expressed great frustration over the discriminatory treatment of their children. The fortification of boundaries between 'our children' and 'Japanese' ones entailed by these experiences were evident in the mothers' use of these terminologies. They too drew boundaries despite making a case for equal treatment via inclusion as Japanese. Exclusion based on perceived differences is buttressed by dominant ethno-nationalist discourses. These tie in with commonly held beliefs in an alleged uniqueness of the Japanese as popularized through a literary genre termed *Nihonjinron*, meaning 'discussions of Japanese-ness' or 'theories of Japanese' (Sugimoto, 1999). Within this literary genre, the concepts of ethnicity, culture and nationality are used interchangeably (ibid, p. 83), revealing stringent definitions of who ought to be 'Japanese'. Publications assigned to *Nihonjinron* increased in number and popularity after Japan's defeat in the Pacific War and have been expressions of non-official popular nationalism heavily relying on 'primordial sentiments inherent in the presumed "ethnic essence" of the Japanese- blood, purity of race, language, mystique- which are the basic "stuff" of *Nihonjinron*, pre- and post-war' (Befu in McVeigh, 2006, p. 193).

In the next section, I explore whether discourses on multiculturalism in Japan soften these boundaries and allow space for children of 'mixed' Japanese parentage to consider themselves Japanese.

'Mixedness' in discourses on multiculturalism

On a sunny day in November 2015 I attended a multicultural festival held in eastern Osaka. Waiting for the upcoming performance by a group of Japanese-Filipino children, I stood amongst the crowd in front of a stage decorated with big white banners bearing the motto of the festival in large lettering: 'Twentieth Eastern-Osaka Exchange festival. My town is a city in Asia. My city is a town in the world'.¹⁴ On stage came a girl in her late teens and introduced their act, first in Japanese '... the kids with roots both in the Philippines and Japan will do their best!' and then in Tagalog '... we are a group of half-Japanese, half-Filipinos ...' Three other girls joined her and as the music played they started to dance. All wore shorts, sneakers and long-sleeved sweaters while performing their well-choreographed moves to the tune of Korean pop music. The song ended and while the girls earned applause, the other half of their group – three boys and one girl – energetically got on stage. Dressed in white T-shirts and jeans they danced to a mash-up of American hip-hop songs before delivering their final performance to 'I saw the sign' by the Swedish pop-group Ace of Base. One of the audience members in front of me turned to her friend and exclaimed: 'Now that is not very traditional!'

The teenagers' performance challenged the usual ways in which ethnic groups were represented at such spectacles of diversity and this did not go unnoticed. Victoria, who had participated, explained:

Actually I think we should dance Filipino dances because we represent the Philippines, not Korea. Hiromi [also part of the dance group] told me she heard someone say: "Why do they dance to K-pop? They should dance to Filipino or English songs." Some of our mothers also think that way. Also, at the festival there are many Koreans and they'd be surprised. One should represent one's own country. (Victoria)

As in many other places, multiculturalism in Japan, or *tabunka kyōsei*,¹⁵ is premised upon primordial understandings of ethnicity, casting ethnic identities as bounded and unchanging (Okubo, 2013). Victoria's statement reveals that she too understood multiculturalism this way and, by agreeing with the critique, participated in the policing of these boundaries.

Tabunka kyōsei has its roots in activism for social equality led by Japan's historical *zainichi* Korean minority since the 1970s (Okubo, 2013, p. 1002). With the arrival of newer immigrants in the 1990s, the term gained popularity and came to be applied mainly to foreigners who, unlike Japan's historical minorities, were culturally and linguistically different from the Japanese majority (ibid.). The state-endorsed version of multiculturalism promoted since the 1990s largely consisted of delivering linguistic support to foreigners, especially to school-children with mother tongues other than Japanese, and of celebrating ethno-cultural diversity. Activists, progressive educators and intellectuals developed a different approach to multiculturalism, one that was more concerned with issues of human rights and substantial citizenship rights, described as 'contested' multiculturalism by Okubo (2013). However, both understandings of *tabunka kyōsei* remained underpinned by the idea of difference, the essentialization of ethnic groups, and a notion of the fixity of ethnicity (ibid. p. 1006). Okubo's findings of how multiculturalism was conceived and out into practice based on her fieldwork in Osaka in 2008 and 2009, strongly parallel my own observations made at various Osaka-based civil society initiatives and at multicultural festivals.

Most of my Japanese-Filipino respondents were involved in activities related to the celebration of multiculturalism either as performers at festivals, as beneficiaries of non-profit school support organized by activists, or as recipients of specific education initiatives.¹⁶ *Tabunka kyōsei* has found its way into Japanese classrooms and non-profit educational centres in the form of mother tongue classes, ethnic clubs or activities organized for children with foreign roots.¹⁷ Victoria attended such activities when she was younger:

Victoria: So we also had, when I was in junior high school, we also had this – it's not a festival but a gathering for half-children: half- Japanese and half-something. I think [the schools in my district] were the ones who led this kind of gathering. Because all the schools in [this part of Osaka], all the half-students were invited there and went there, gathered.

Interviewer: What was the festival about?

Victoria: It was just a gathering. Getting to know each other's culture, each other's country and making new friends. New foreign friends. We always had a cooking– the mothers cooked, and they cooked different dishes from around the world. And then the children, when the mothers are cooking, the

children would go to different rooms. Then we all play games about – about other countries and stuff. It was kind of like that.

[...]

Interviewer: Do you find these gatherings useful? Do you understand the rationale behind it?

Victoria: For us? Erm, I think that maybe we, us, we foreigners are kind of open-minded when it comes to foreigners because we are foreigners so I think they should explain, they should do those activities for the Japanese. Because we are already open-minded.

Interviewer: So you think this should have been open to Japanese as well?

Victoria: Aha. Not just us. Also, to raise awareness.

Interviewer: So there were no Japanese?

Victoria: So, there were Japanese, but the Japanese were teachers. Our teachers. They were the ones who brought us to the gathering.

Activities such as these, developed as part of the multicultural education programme in Osaka city, are intended to help children with foreign roots develop a favourable attitude towards their ethnic backgrounds (Okubo, 2013, p. 1013) but Japanese students, as Victoria noted, remained conspicuously absent in such activities.

The desire to make children with non-Japanese roots feel proud of their heritage was also voiced by the organizers of a learning centre for mixed roots children. This support group was initiated to help foreign parents and their children get through the Japanese education system and is organized by Mr. Kim, who has been involved in other NGO work before, and Mr. Yamazaki, the school principal of Minami Elementary school in Osaka. Mr. Kim himself experienced difficulties and discrimination growing up a third-generation Korean in Japan which fed into his motivation to support children with non-Japanese backgrounds (Nakano, 2016). The group was first organized in 2013, after a foreign mother attempted to take her own life and that of her two children, both pupils at Minami elementary school in Osaka, known for its high ratio in non-Japanese students (ibid.). This tragic incident brought to light the urgent need for supporting children and their parents with schooling in Japan.

In our personal conversations, Mr. Kim admitted his efforts were but a drop on a hot stone; the children attending the support classes face numerous challenges related to their parents' precarious employment, poverty, difficult family situations and, linked to these three, frequent shifts of places of residence within Osaka or even between countries. Nevertheless, a focus of Mr. Kim, Mr. Yamazaki, and their group of volunteers remains emancipation through the development of pride in ethnic 'difference'. Mr. Yamazaki is quoted in a newspaper article saying

I think that, in our future multicultural co-existence society, children, full of "difference," will be our "treasures". I also think that if these children, not as those who are oppressed by the difficulties of living in a different culture and drop out from society, but as those who very much know such difficulties, can become a great force in building bridges of international exchange.¹⁸

The emphasis of difference and foreignness in activities geared at creating a multicultural society has come at the price of largely excluding Japanese persons without any 'mixed' roots to claim. Addressing this phenomenon, Mr. Yamazaki acknowledges that as they moved forward with the creation of a multicultural school '... Minami elementary

school has heard people say “foreigners get all the treatment to the expense of the Japanese.” This is an unfortunate opinion. I think that multicultural co-existence schools are rich environments for both Japanese and foreign children’.¹⁹

While multicultural environments are desired for both Japanese and non-Japanese students, the failure to include Japanese students in their creation remains unchallenged.

At a festival in spring 2016 that was held at a high-school in Osaka known for its large share of foreign students I made similar observations revealing how absent Japanese students are from the celebration of multiculturalism.

Students had come from various schools in Osaka to attend the festival, as the colourful mix of school uniforms revealed. After a few words of welcome by the school principal, students from each class were asked to come on stage and introduce themselves. These brief introductions – during which students said their names, mentioned their ethnic roots and how long ago they arrived in Japan – were interspersed with musical and dance performances. All but two of the students introducing themselves on stage throughout the event had their roots in China, Thailand, Nepal, the Philippines, Indonesia, Laos, Vietnam, Brazil, Colombia, Congo or Korea. This display of diversity was accompanied by ethnic performances: a dance performance by five girls in pastel coloured costumes and large hot pink fans, a dragon dance, a Nepalese dance performed by a boy and a girl in what looked like national costumes in matching design.

The absence of students identifying as Japanese was noticeable. Class-sizes in Japanese public schools are about 32 pupils large. But on stage, the number of students introducing themselves ranged from three to about a dozen at a time,²⁰ leading me to conclude that only those with foreign roots had joined. The low attendance rate by Japanese students without foreign roots made me wonder if they were uninterested in, or felt excluded from, the celebration of multiculturalism at school. According to Okubo (2013, p. 1015) ‘... not all teachers see the value of teaching *both* foreign and Japanese children about the richness of diverse cultures that comprise Japan today’, making multicultural programmes and festivals seem like activities primarily for ‘non-Japanese’. Their low involvement indeed reinforced the boundary between Japanese and ethnic *others* and buttressed the idea of children with foreign roots as a population in need of special care as a problem population.

Multicultural policies in most countries have primarily focused on foreigners and their incorporation into society, instead of treating increasing ethno-cultural diversity as something that concerned society at large. In the process, immigrants were often cast as problem population who ended up being either vilified as unwilling to integrate into their host society, as in many Western European contexts (Jupp, 2015) or infantilized, as Nora Hui-Jung Kim (2012) argues is the case for South Korea. In Japan too, multiculturalism has focused primarily on the incorporation of foreigners rather than on the recognition of ethnic diversity among the Japanese, or on the development of an overarching national identity for all Japanese citizens as it has been the case in classical countries of immigration (Kashiwasaki, 2000, pp. 31–32).

As the round of introductions and the performances came to a close, everyone was instructed to regroup according to ‘roots groups’ and, with their groups, move to their respectively assigned rooms located in the building. Subsequently split up into even smaller units, the idea of the activity was to give the students the opportunity to talk about problems and issues they face in school and in Japan generally. As individual

students did so, I noticed that their language abilities differed; some were fluent in Tagalog, but spoke barely any Japanese. Others spoke nothing but Japanese.

The round of introductions clearly showed the heterogeneity of our group hidden behind the label 'Filipino roots': a mix of people with various migratory histories including individuals born and raised in Japan whose linguistic abilities and ethno-cultural upbringing vary despite claiming at least one Filipino parent. The label 'mixed roots' children is applied to all children and youth with at least one migrant parent notwithstanding their upbringing and thereby reinforces essentialized categories despite the intent of creating space for 'difference'

Kim and Oh (2012) confirm that this phenomenon is not only limited to Japan. Comparing Japan to South Korea, multiculturalism taught at school in both countries targets migrant populations and fails to encourage Japanese or Koreans to rethink notions of *Japaneseness* or *Koreanness* (p. 124). Although the authors argue that multicultural practices in Korea generally reflect an openness to conceiving Korean society as multicultural, a segregation of groups of migrants based on nationality remains because of 'Korean policymakers' notion that all nations are homogenous nation-states like Korea' (ibid.). As in the Japanese case, this segregation and the failure to critically rethink notions of *Koreanness* reify boundaries between Koreans and ethnic others. Indeed, multiculturalism has generally been criticized for reifying cultural distinctions, exaggerating their importance, and solidifying artificial distinctions of race and ethnicity (Bloemraad, Korteweg, & Yurdakul, 2008, p. 161).

Several authors have called attention to multicultural education in Japan (Nukaga, 2003) and Korea (Choi, 2010; Kang, 2010) failing to touch upon rights education, as well as issues of social and global justice while dwelling excessively on cultural fetishism (J.K. Kim, 2011). The problem with the latter is that '[b]y reducing complex social problems to culture, educators naively believe that an understanding of cultural difference will address so-called cultural conflicts' (ibid, p. 1598). More often than not, problems labelled 'cultural' are rooted in social inequality. Discourses on *tabunka kyōsei*, both government endorsed and 'contested', moreover fail to account for organic forms of multiculturalism wherein relationships and friendships develop across supposedly fixed ethnic categories.

At the learning centre where I met Aimi, I also met a thirteen year old boy nicknamed *Duck* in Spanish by his Mexican step-father. *Duck* has a Japanese father and a Filipino mother who, after her divorce, met *Duck's* current step-father. The couple had two more children, *Duck's* Mexican-Filipino half-siblings. The clear-cut ethnic categories upon which Japanese multiculturalism is premised are challenged by the cultural and linguistic blending experienced by *Duck* through his upbringing. His upbringing is illustrative of how various migratory movements to Japan have brought together people of diverse ethnic and national backgrounds as co-workers, neighbours, or classmates and of how these encounters have resulted in friendships and relationships creating cultural amalgams that go beyond the imagination of bounded ethnic groups.

Conclusion

I want to say strongly and clearly, "We are Japanese! Don't separate us! Don't call us *gaijin*! Don't call us *haafu* to distinguish us from you! We are Japanese too! There are many of us

who look different but are the same. There are many who look the same but are different. [...]” (Murphy-Shigematsu, 2012, p. 209)

The case of Japanese-Filipinos shows the importance of dominant understandings and practices of multiculturalism as a frame for ‘mixed’ ethnic identities to develop. Children born from Japanese-Filipina unions ‘are the embodiment of hybridity’ (Mackie, 1998, p. 56), ‘whose identities further blur the assumed line between the Japanese [...] and the Filipinos [...]’ (Suzuki, 2007, p. 438). However, dominant discourses on Japanese national identity and the way multiculturalism is conceived and practiced help normalize their disruptive potential and maintain the Us/Them binary.

In practice, this results in the policing of boundaries between ‘Japanese’ and ‘non-Japanese’ in micro-level interaction (such as among classmates in school) and at the meso-level (through projects and programmes targeting ‘mixed roots’ children only). ‘Mixed roots’ individuals remain outsiders, not quite Japanese. Dominant discourses constructing the Japanese nation as a monoracial, monolingual and monoethnic nation leave no space for diversity within the definition of ‘Japanese’, creating the necessity for alternative labels like *haafu* or ‘mixed roots’. Japanese multiculturalism does not provide alternative narratives of *Japaneseness* but preserves the myth of Japanese racial homogeneity by recognizing diversity while maintaining ethnic and racial boundaries. These categories have not been actively questioned by my respondents. Rather, they show flexibility in adopting these various labels – *haafu*, ‘mixed roots’, Filipino, *Firipin-jin*²¹ – in different contexts.

The cultural trappings signalling difference and diversity are central to multiculturalist practices in Japan. Within the context of the multicultural festivals, the maintenance and manufacturing of difference are political and of crucial importance. Indeed, these festivals are not merely a spectacle but also a performance through which ‘we affirm and reaffirm, construct and reconstruct hegemonic social roles and definitions’. (Nagel in J.K. Kim, 2011, p. 1600) ‘Mixed’ Japanese Filipino children slipping into the roles of Filipinos during these performances therefore fulfil their expected roles as foreigners in Japan and tacitly agree – at least momentarily – to the Japanese/foreigner divide. Victoria’s comment about the future of her and her friends’ dance performance at multicultural festivals illustrates this point: ‘One should represent one’s own country’.

Notes

1. All names are pseudonyms, except where quotes from newspaper articles are used where persons are identified by name.
2. In Japan ‘salary-man’ refers to male white collar workers.
3. This includes ‘mixed’ Japanese-Filipino youth and migrant Filipino youth without Japanese lineage to claim.
4. This can be done until age 21.
5. According to data from the Japanese Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, Table 1-37 *Number of marriages by nationality of husband and wife, by year*, available at <http://www.mhlw.go.jp/english/database/db-hh/1-2.html>, accessed 30 August 2017.
6. *Haafu* is considered discriminatory by some parents and activists since the term suggests incompleteness. *Daburu* (double) gained some popularity as a viable alternative (Murphy-Shigematsu, 2001) but nevertheless, *haafu* continues to be the most commonly utilized term.
7. *Hafu* – the film by Nishikura, Takagi, and Spitzmiller (2013).

8. Several authors have written about how racial hierarchies prevailed within Japanese society (Befu, 2001; McVeigh, 2006), were felt on the Japanese labour market (Tsuda, 2011) and were visible in media representations (Prieler, 2010). Japanese and persons of European descent (particularly males) topped the list, followed by persons of 'mixed' Japanese descent, non-Japanese Asians, and persons of African descent.
9. The assumption of a 'Western' identity by 'mixed' Japanese children rather than a Japanese one for reasons of beneficence is contextual. The situation of *haafu* in Japan is diverse and changed over time; during the post-war period most *haafu* were considered a social issue because they frequently lived in impoverished conditions and their mothers were later often abandoned by their partners at a time when there was much social stigma attached to being a single mother (Fish, 2009). Then, writes Singer (2000), those *haafu* 'who could often tried to pass as full-blooded Japanese and denied their American heritage.' (p. 77) However today, most *haafu* born to 'Western'-Japanese couples are of higher social class and therefore do not face the same kind of discrimination. Still, numerous children of 'mixed' heritage continue to be bullied in school due to their perceptible or known foreign heritage.
10. Here, I maintained the label used by Almonte-Acosta in her paper.
11. Lit. means 'outside person' and is a commonly used but condescending reference to foreigners.
12. Cf. Yuusuke (2009), an intern volunteering for the Metro Manila-based NGO Maligaya House describes the NGO's Japanese-Filipino clients in one of his newsletter contributions as '100% Filipino linguistically and culturally'.
13. The large majority of Japanese-Filipino children have Filipina mothers and Japanese fathers.
14. 第20回東大阪際交流フェスティバル。私の街はアジアの街。私の街は世界の街。
15. Harmonious multicultural co-living
16. NGO workers, volunteers and teachers were important gate-keepers who played a crucial role in introducing me to my respondents.
17. Within discourses on multiculturalism, the expression *gaikoku ni ruutsu o motsu ko*, children who have roots in a foreign country, has become common place. In schools in Osaka, the expression is used to refer to migrant children, Japan-born children with at least one migrant parent, as well as young Japan-born third- or fourth-generation Koreans (Okubo, 2013, p. 1013). I too have noticed the common use of this expression among activists and teachers and the broad range of backgrounds it applies to.
18. 「違い」が溢れているこの子供たちは、これからの多文化共生の社会にとって「宝」やと思うんです。この子供たちが異文化に暮らす厳しさに押しつぶされ社会からドロップアウトしてしまうのではなくて、こういった厳しさを知っている子供たちが国際交流の懸け橋になったらすごい力になると思うんです。(Nakano, 2016)
19. 多文化共生の学校づくりを進めていくと、南小学校は、「外国人のことばかり手厚くて、その分、日本人のことを考えてもらえてないんじゃないか」という声が聞こえてきます。とても、残念な気持ちになります。多文化共生の学校というのは、日本人の子供にとっても外国人の子供にとってもこんなに恵まれた環境はないと思うんです。(ibid.)
20. From what I observed, most students who joined the festival that day introduced themselves when their class got on stage.
21. Although 'Filipino' and '*Firipin-jin*' mean the same, I noticed that '*Firipin-jin*' was more often used when my respondents reported how they were perceived by their Japanese peers, reflecting the attributive notion of the term. The use of the Japanese term may have come out stronger in my interviews as most were conducted in either English or mixing English and Tagalog. 'Filipino' on the other hand implied greater ownership.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Funding

This research was funded by the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science Postdoctoral Fellowship [JSPS\OF1/482].

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